

INTRODUCTION

High Street and the University Area

High Street is the “Main Street” of Columbus’s University Area. Because it adjoins The Ohio State University campus, it is a unique urban corridor that serves a diverse community of residential neighborhoods. High Street has traditionally catered to the needs of a college community, but in the past decade, students’ increased mobility has multiplied their choices for housing and shopping, thus contributing to the area’s decline. High Street merchants, who must now compete for a market that used to be more stable, must also respond to challenges such as a high concentration of low-income housing, increased crime, inadequate public services, and a lack of parking. Recognizing the need for action, The Ohio State University and the City of Columbus formed Campus Partners to study the needs of the area, identify revitalization strategies, and invest in its redevelopment.

Four years of planning produced the *University Neighborhoods Revitalization Plan Concept Document*, adopted by City Council in 1997, and the subsequent *A Plan for High Street: Creating a 21st Century Main Street*, published in 2000. Both documents call for the establishment of standards and design review as critically necessary tools to ensure that all investment along



Ground-floor retail and enlarged buildings on either side of the Newport—a symbol of High Street’s diversity—would bring even more energy to this stretch of the street. Such incremental changes are the key to strengthening High Street’s “Main Street” character.

High Street implements the goals and recommendations of this comprehensive planning effort. *The University/High Street Development and Design Guidelines* (hereafter referred to as the *Guidelines*) represents an essential step in implementing a broad-based revitalization strategy for High Street and its adjacent neighborhoods.

This document conveys High Street’s full promise as a viable 21st-century “Main Street,” blending:

- pride in its historic elements and celebration of the present;
- a commitment to serving the full spectrum of the surrounding community and its visitors; and
- a highly competitive commercial district possessing the pedestrian-friendly character of a traditional “Main Street.”

Members of the University Area Commission (left photo) review a new development proposal on site. Campus Partners (right photo) was formed by The Ohio State University to study the needs of the University Area and foster its revitalization.



The *Guidelines* reflect High Street's richly layered character—a place that interweaves important historic resources, lively student “hangouts,” exciting performing and visual arts, neighborhood businesses, and many other elements to form the vital heart for one of this country's most significant university communities.

Goals

High Street has the potential to be one of the liveliest streets in Columbus—serving the cultural, consumer and entertainment needs of both its vibrant university population and its permanent residential population, as well as appealing to the many visitors who come from around the world to visit The Ohio State University. This document is intended to give direction to property owners and investors regarding building and site improvements, new construction, and graphics in order to achieve the revitalization objectives articulated under Urban Design Principles (see page 10). The *Guidelines* aim to:

- preserve and enhance the unique and desirable characteristics of High Street;
- promote creative design of high quality and stimulate new development to fit within the context of High Street;
- attract business investment and promote the economic vitality of the corridor;

- enhance High Street's pedestrian orientation and mix of uses; and
- promote preservation and rehabilitation of existing buildings that contribute to High Street's diverse “Main Street” character.

Following these *Guidelines* will help protect the traditional urban fabric from inappropriate new construction, misguided rehabilitation, and unwanted demolition; while assuring that new work is compatible with the goals of adjoining property owners, the community, and the city. They will, in turn, significantly benefit and protect the economic value of the properties overall and preserve the legacy of High Street's unique historic patterns of development and character-giving 19th- and 20th-century buildings. With the infusion of new development and the careful treatment and preservation of existing buildings, the old and new can invigorate each other in a creative environment.

To enhance the diversity of buildings and environments along High Street, significant portions of the *Guidelines* are context-specific. Eleven zones, each possessing distinct characteristics, have been identified for the University/High Street corridor. In each zone, individual goals and standards are stated that would enhance its special character. These zones are identified and described on pages 19-27.



**The University/
High Street Guide-
lines give direction
to building
improvements and
new construction
for the purpose
of achieving a
cohesive, quality
environment
of pedestrian-
oriented mixed
uses.**

URBAN DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The following core urban design principles have emerged from years of district-wide planning and have been articulated most recently in the *Plan*. These principles address and integrate the many facets of High Street's rich and varied personality and provide the structure for a renewed vision of a 21st-century "Main Street" that enhances and reinvigorates the street—physically, socially, and economically. Based upon these principles, the *Guidelines* reflect community values and recognizes the opportunity for increased economic vitality.



High Street should be a common ground that draws all elements of the area's diverse community, as well as visitors.

As identified in the *Plan*, High Street should be...

Viewed as common ground...

- offering a mix of uses and public spaces that draws the full spectrum of the area's diverse community and its visitors to shop, learn, eat, play, browse, live, and work together.

Enjoyed as a walkable street that invites pedestrians..

- lined with uses that engage pedestrians and generate activity day and evening;
- enlivened by outdoor public places in which to sit and eat, meet friends, people-watch, read or enjoy the weather;
- enhanced with public art, innovative street furniture, landscaping, and other pedestrian amenities;
- enhanced by extensive visibility into street-level interiors for shopping and browsing.

High Street should be a walkable street that welcomes pedestrians, along the lines of State Street in Madison, Wisconsin.



introduction



New economic opportunities, such as this proposed bookstore on High Street, can bring significant benefits—rehabilitation of notable older buildings, outdoor dining facing the street, employment, and others.



High Street's revitalization should build stronger links to adjacent neighborhoods.



High Street's revitalization should blend preservation and new design of spirit and energy, as in Boston's dynamic Point area.



High Street should have a distinctive public realm, marked by an artful streetscape, as in Denver's Lower Downtown District.

Supported by essential infrastructure and management that make the street convenient and comfortable to use, such as...

- safe, sufficient, and well-located parking;
- functional pedestrian and vehicular circulation systems;
- sufficient marketing, maintenance, and security.

Strengthened by diverse economic opportunities that benefit the community with...

- a wide variety of new jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities that reflect the diversity of its residents;
- new retail and entertainment uses that draw people to enjoy the street and, consequently, enhance the viability of existing businesses;
- new uses for existing buildings that convey High Street's historic character;
- housing opportunities in rehabilitated and new buildings;
- sufficient density to support social and economic vitality.

Appreciated as a pedestrian-friendly place, a seam...

- easily and safely crossed by pedestrians, particularly at points that support circulation among the campus, the street, and adjacent neighborhoods;
- along which friction between pedestrians and vehicular traffic is minimized, such as by using curbside parking as a buffer.

Linked to adjacent neighborhoods...

- through uses that serve the spectrum of the area's population;
- through design, materials, and massing of buildings that relate visually to the surrounding residential buildings;
- through the use of architecturally developed rear facades with a high degree of transparency;
- by public spaces that attract people to enjoy High Street as a focus of community life;
- by well-maintained alleyways and rear service and parking areas;
- by handsome local streets and pleasant, well-maintained pedestrian connections with street trees and other appropriate streetscape elements and transitional signage.

Enhanced by quality design and construction, both traditional and cutting-edge in character, and...

- expressed in old or new buildings by a traditional rhythm of facades and other qualities designed to enhance the pedestrian experience;
- marked by both the preservation of historically significant buildings and new architecture of spirit and energy;
- achieved in every case by quality materials and well-crafted details.

Enlivened by a distinctive public realm...

- expressed in private-sector signage and other graphic identification and design details that convey the area's unique and diverse personality;
- enhanced by artful streetscape elements.

The Value of Guidelines

Established development and design guidelines have proven to be a critical economic development tool in the revitalization of traditional “Main Streets,” as well as in the promotion and preservation of historic and neighborhood commercial areas, both in Columbus and throughout the nation. They have promoted reinvestment by ensuring that individual improvements collectively reinforce and enhance a street’s character and pedestrian nature. When uniformly applied, guidelines can spur investment by providing a measure of assurance that one’s investment will not be devalued by an inappropriate, low-quality development nearby. Guidelines also ensure that new development appropriately contributes to the overall character and economic vitality of the street. Many corridors without such guidance have resulted in significantly underperforming uses, a hodgepodge of development types, a weakened pedestrian environment, and an underutilization of valuable urban property.

When accompanied by a review process, guidelines provide the review body with a framework for the objective evaluation of development



All the building blocks for contemporary urban commercial districts, including fast-food restaurants, can be planned and designed to create a 21st-century Main Street.

proposals. By following guidelines, property owners and developers can design projects in accordance with the community’s expected level of quality and visions for future development. Without guidelines, the University Area risks future development that may be haphazard and inconsistent with its vision. Badly sited, poorly designed, or shoddily built projects not only result in a loss to the owners and users, but significantly undermine efforts to insure the long-term viability of High Street and the surrounding neighborhoods. By contrast, good design reinforces the quality and competitiveness of the business environment.